



# The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

February, 2022

## Join the Great Backyard Bird Count

This is the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Great Backyard Bird Count.

Please consider joining this fun and interesting citizen project which is the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science/community science project, reporting data in almost real time.

In 1998 the Cornell Lab of Ornithology collaborated with the National Audubon Society to start this nation-wide bird survey. In 2009 Birds Canada joined in to make it an international event. In 2013 it became world-wide.

It takes place over four days beginning on the morning of Friday, February 18th, and ending on the evening of Monday, February 21st.



During this time-frame all you need to do is spend a minimum of 15 minutes, (Continued on page 2)

## The year's list begins...

I'm a shameless 'lister' so my Geauga County checklist went from 208 species at 11:59 pm, December 31, 2021, to "0" at midnight! Since I was sleeping at midnight that didn't mean much, but when I opened the garage door at 7:32 am to let the dog out, the first birds I heard were two great horned owls calling back and forth in the woods. I took that as a good omen for 2022, along with the fact that it was 48 degrees and the county had abundant open water to explore. After walking the dog my year list was up to 17 species, all expected species, but it did include a red-shouldered and red-tailed hawk, both heard in the woods.

On my way to explore LaDue Reservoir my peripheral vision noticed five geese flying into a field of corn stubble. They looked lighter than Canadas, so I pulled over, grabbed my bins and was surprised to see snow geese – all white birds with black wing (Continued on page 2)

## From the Dustbin...

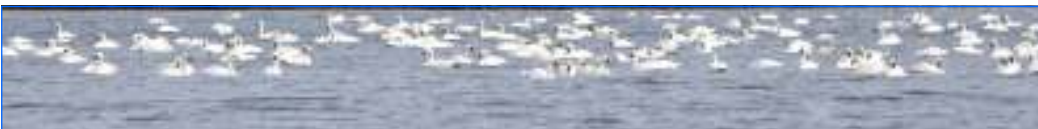
(Tidbits from ASGC's history)

The following is excerpted from *The Cleveland Audubon Society Bulletin*, Vol 2, No 5 February 1956:

### Comment on the Season

Outstanding among the host of southbound birds which passed through our region during the autumn was the spectacular flight of Canada Geese and of Whistling Swans (*aka Tundra Swans*) during the night and throughout much of the day of November 5.

The Swans, in particular, occurred in unprecedented numbers. There were some 300 on Lake Erie off Mentor Headlands, an estimated 1,000 at White City, and a flock of 500 or more on the ponds of the Sherwin Farm in Waite Hill. Outside our region to the east, from seven to nine thousand Swans spent the entire day and night of the 5th at Pymatuning Lake according to the account of the warden there, while from the Sandusky Bay area to the west we had a report of a tremendous flock numbering as many as 12,000



Tundra swans on La Due Reservoir, in late 2021. A few short of 9,000...

Photo: M. Valencic

(Continued on page 2)

## From the Nest...



I always take special note of the first bird that I see of the year. I'm not sure what it portends but this year mine was a mourning dove. In many cultures, doves are a sign of peace. We can hope! And we can do our part to make it happen.

February brings the Great Backyard Bird Count. It is an interesting and fun four-day international event that is easy

to participate in even if you don't leave your home. This will be described in more detail later in this newsletter. Consider giving it a try.

Also please give our Third Thursday Night Naturalist Series a try. On the third Thursday of the month at 7 pm we have had some amazing speakers with excellent expertise on a variety of topics.

It's easy to register on our website and you will have an enjoyable 45-60 minutes online with like-minded people. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Matt Valencic for putting this on for us. I hope you can join us. This month it will make you think of spring!

—Jim Tomko, President

## GBBC

(Continued from page 1)

or as long as you like, counting all the birds you see on a hike, out your window, in your backyard or from your car.

Then you log onto Birdcount.org and record your sightings. This information is almost instantly visible to scientists all over the world who study trends in bird populations.

There is a very intriguing map showing where checklists are coming in live from all over the world. You can see which countries are up and birding and which countries are sleeping at night.

Not only is it fun but your data will be contributing to the scientific knowledge of the bird world. I

always find it interesting to see which country submits the most bird checklists.

It is free and easy and helpful. Give it a try.

—Jim Tomko



How many birds can you see out your window? (Squirrels don't count!)

Photo: C. Lillich

## Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



### Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)

You can find these song birds any month of the year in our area but winter is the easiest time to see them as they flock by the hundreds or even thousands on bare agricultural fields, golf courses or grassy areas of airport runways.

At seven and a quarter inches long with a 12-inch wingspan and just over one ounce, they are hardy souls able to withstand whipping winter winds on frozen farm fields.

Their backs are sandy brown which makes them hard to see against the ground until they move or turn their light-yellow face with black eye stripe and dark breast band toward you. The “horns” are on the male and are often difficult to see. Of course, those are not horns but small feather tufts.

The dark tail with white outer tail feathers is a good field mark. Most of the times that I've discovered them I noticed a movement way out in the field and then more and more became visible as they foraged for seeds and insects on the ground. They most often are seen foraging in areas where the snow has blown off the field.

The male has an aerial courtship display where he flies up to 800 feet high. Then while circling, he sings his breeding song before silently and surprisingly rapidly plummets straight back to earth.

They nest on the ground away from other horned larks. The female digs a small scrape and lines it with finely woven grasses, covering the excavated dirt with pebbles, dirt clods, and even dung. She lays three to four brown-speckled, pearly, grayish-green eggs and incubates them for 10-12 days. If a predator approaches she will flutter about on the ground, feigning a broken wing and luring the egg eater away from the nest.

Wintertime is when they form nomadic flocks moving from field to field. They are out wandering now. I hope you get a chance to see them.

—Jim Tomko

## List

(Continued from page 1)

tips. I found a good place to grab some pictures before texting my birding buddies so they could get here and enjoy them. Closer inspection of the pictures showed them to be Ross's geese! This was nuts, in a good way.



Ross's geese

Photo: M. Valencic

The warm temperature brought fog that made the rest of the day less dramatic. I did manage to add a rough-legged hawk, American kestrel and a mockingbird to my list before heading home. In all, 34 species for the first birding day of the new year. Not a bad showing, but truth be told, I would have been happy to just have the great horned owls and Ross's geese.

—Matt Valencic

## Dustbin

(Continued from page 1)

birds. The Swans did not linger in our immediate region, however, and the last record for the season is of a mere nine at the Sherwin Farm on November 16.

(Editor's note: Read about recent swan counts in Matt Valencic's article in the December, 2021, issue of The House Wren, available on our website under Documents.)

Analysis of the warbler records discloses a sizable movement over the Labor Day week-end, when 21 species were reported on September 4; and again on September 18, when 20 species were reported, among them large numbers of Black-throated Green and Bay-breasted Warblers and Redstarts. **So numerous were warblers about Buttonbush Bog at the Holden Arboretum on the morning of the 18th “that an accurate count was out of the question.”** (Emphasis editor)

A wave of Myrtle Warblers flowed through the Rocky River Valley on October 8 and 9, more than 200 being reported on the 8th.

(Never heard of a Myrtle Warbler? According to [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org), it is the eastern one of two distinct subspecies of the yellow-rumped warbler, the other being the “Audubon's” warbler in the west. They were previously considered separate species.)



Yellow-rumped warbler in winter plumage.

Photo: M. Valencic

## Committee Reports from the BOT Meeting, 1/25/2022

**Sanctuary Committee:** Requested (and received) permission to spend up to \$10,000 on invasive species control and repair of bridges, stairs and blinds.

**Education Committee:** Speakers Bureau has presented in-person talks to three organizations since November, and there are five more scheduled by April. Third Thursday Zoom presentations have featured speakers Harvey Webster, Andy Jones, and Bob Bartolotta. There has been no Junior Birder's Day for two years due to Covid, so the committee is exploring ideas for an outdoor children's program in June.

**Documentum Committee:** Received eight boxes of books from the estate of Frank McConoughey, a longtime member of Audubon and avid birder. A computer and scanner for archiving documents and cataloguing books will be installed in the Novak Education Center in the next couple of months.

**Membership Committee:** Our newest committee is chaired by Carol Lillich. Goals include online membership and establishing different levels of membership.

**Communications Committee:** Due to the annual holiday rush and delivery/printing delays, *The House Wren* will be published eight times a year instead of nine, with the December and January issues combined. —Editor

## In case you missed it

"Winter Tracks" January 29th

I always look forward to our annual winter track hike. Those tracks show what other more secretive creatures share our sanctuaries.

Unfortunately, the newsletter deadline this month occurred before the hike took place so I cannot report the happenings on that hike. But I can tell you to be careful what you wish for! I was hoping for a little snow to show the tracks and then we all got walloped with a good, old fashioned, winter snowstorm that shut things down for a day!

Tracks are everywhere. If you are able, get out and take a look. Eastern gray squirrel tracks are leading right up to your feeder. Cottontail rabbit tracks are heading right under your feeder along with tracks from that flock of wild turkey that you saw last fall. And tracks show the comings and goings of the white-tailed deer herd that partake of that bird seed. The tracks in the snow also show that it is not just raccoons that raid the suet feeder at night. Virginia opossums also enjoy it.

There is a regular highway system and from your bird feeders showing that you are not just feeding birds. But you already knew or suspected that. The tracks in the snow prove it!

—Jim Tomko

Photo: J. Tomko  
An otter chute in the Aurora Sanctuary.



## Upcoming Events

### Third Thursday

### Field Trips

**Feb 17 7:00pm**

*"A Tour of iNaturalist"*

Via Zoom®

iNaturalist is the popular Citizen Science that helps you identify plants and animals of all types and from around the world. Linda Gilbert is a Naturalist with the Geauga Park District and a long-time user of iNaturalist. Linda will introduce us to iNat, show us how to create our own account and upload our observations of the natural world. Learn how to navigate the site for your personal observations and how to contribute observations to PROJECTS like bioblitzes, butterfly surveys and more.

**Mar 17 7:00pm**

*"Songs from the Pond"*

Via Zoom®

Birds aren't the only singers in the spring! From the earliest songs of wood frogs and spring peepers to the endlessly entertaining songs of green frogs, bullfrogs and American toads, there's always something to hear from the ponds and wetlands.

Lisa Rainsong will guide us to songs of NE Ohio's frogs and toads from the initial ice melt of March through the early summer songs of June. There may be a few more singers than you realized!

Register for these programs at  
[www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events)

**Feb 20 9:30am**

*"Great Backyard Bird Count"*

Aurora Sanctuary

Join in on this international bird count that occurs this weekend throughout the world. We will count every bird we see and hear on this two-mile path that has been surveyed for many years. You will be contributing to our knowledge of what species use our sanctuary in the winter and this information will be shared on e-bird and with interested parties all over the world. Dress for the weather including proper footwear for snow or mud. Meet at the Brettschneider Parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

**Mar 26 9:00am**

*"Waterfowl Wander"*

LaDue Reservoir

This is our annual "caravan style" field trip to witness the awesome breeding plumage of the wonderful waterfowl that move through our area on their way to northern breeding grounds. The drakes are in their resplendent plumage to impress the females while at the same time astounding us! Early spring brings more than 20 species of waterfowl to rest and refuel during their rapid northward migration. Please join us with a full tank of gas. We will meet at the Ladue Reservoir boat ramp at the end of Washington Street in Auburn Township (Gauga County).

## Did You Know?

A horned lark's behavioral response to the male's courtship display looks quite a bit like a bird taking a dust bath. This sometimes confuses the males. The male will become excited by a female actually taking a dust bath but she is not receptive when he approaches.

—Jim Tomko



**DATED MAIL**

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)  
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Please recycle this newsletter

***A Wry Smile***

TEACHER: George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted it. Now, Louis, do you know why his father didn't punish him?

LOUIS: Because George still had the axe in his hand.....



***An Audubon Moment* Insecurity!**

It was probably just me but as a “newbie birder” and a 21-year-old male, there is a feeling that you “know it all” and are as worldly as you can get. I possessed a quick, sharp mind but, unfortunately, absolutely no wisdom and very little experience in life in general.

After finals week my senior year in college, Dr. Osborn, our ornithology professor, offered to take a dozen of us on his annual pilgrimage to Magee Marsh. Back then (1979), it was known as Crane Creek State Park. It did not have much of a board-walk at that time but it was still “Mecca” for spring migration watchers.

We camped at East Harbor State Park in the group camping area, packing into two or three modest tents. Everyone has their quirks but I was surprised to see our respected professor eat his favorite camp food: a bologna and peanut butter sandwich. There was no cooking involved and it was quick so as to rapidly return to the trail!

We saw an amazing array of species over those three days. Our checklist boasted 107 species. Most of us were seeing dozens of species for the first time in our lives, known as “lifers.” We saw almost all the species of wood warblers possible, topped off with the brilliant, radiant plumage of scarlet tanagers, Baltimore orioles, indigo buntings, and rose-breasted grosbeaks to name just a few.

Well, keep in mind my two opening sentences. As I left the trail completely awestruck and excited about all that I had seen, some more experienced birders were just coming in and excitedly asked what I was seeing. To be cool and confident, I replied, “Oh, just the usual spring migrants.”

To which the astonished birders said, “What?!?! Didn’t you get to see all those flying gems decorating the trees like Christmas that are here for only a few weeks of the year?!?!”

That was a moment of learning for me. I’m now open and honest about my observations and happy to learn from others, appreciating all of nature especially those “common” things! Never hide or stop being astounded by stunning Mother Nature.

—Jim Tomko